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THE MOST IMPORTANT MOTIVES FOR BEHAVIOR IN THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

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It is a common belief that action is rationally controlled. In this, however, we deceive ourselves. Our actions are actually determined by a variety of motives often contradictory of which we are frequently wholly unconscious. Moreover, we go astray when we transfer our criterion of rationality to the actions of men who belong to an earlier age and a different civilization. If nowadays a German, an Englishman, and an American act quite differently under similar circumstances, how much more must this be true of men in antiquity. It stands to the credit of Jacob Burckhardt to have shown in his book on the Age of Constantine the Great¹ how different were the motives by which men in the past were controlled from those familiar to us.

Theology has also pursued this line of thought. At present it emphasizes, with almost excessive sharpness, the difference between the world-view of primitive Christianity and that of our age. It also takes pains to show how this difference must have produced a peculiar type of action, varying from that of our day. It is, in fact, scarcely possible for us to imagine how men would act who believed the air to be full of all sorts of spirits, and who expected the

¹ *Die Zeit Konstantins des Grossen*, Basel, 1852, 2. Aufl., Leipzig, 1880.

end of the world and the immediate destruction of all things. What seems to us irrational stands out as normal in their behavior.

On the other hand, these first Christians lived as do men today in their world which was unfolded in the same familiar succession of day and night, summer and winter; in a world of eating and drinking, toil and recreation, trade and commerce, distress and anxiety, sickness and death. How did they live? What were the incentives determining their action? This question deserves further consideration.

In the first place, it is a fact that our only sources of information, the New Testament writings, are obviously largely indifferent toward the common circumstances of life. Neither in the case of Jesus nor of his apostles do we know what they ate and drank, or how they were dressed. We have no notion of their daily life. The sources give us only individual acts, or, more especially, single words, expressions of ideas. It is much easier to write about the theology of the New Testament, or about the world-view of primitive Christianity, than about the activities of Christians, and the motives prompting their action.

I

Primitive man lived under the spell of belief in the power of the stars, the guidance of omens, and the sinister effects of magical arts. Even such enlightened men as the emperor Tiberius were tools in the hands of their astrologers who claimed to read the future from the constellation of the stars.² Accordingly a contradiction was always in evidence. On the one hand man felt himself a slave of destiny bound by an unalterable fate, the *ἀνάρκη*; yet, on the other hand, conscious of his freedom of will, he tried to interfere with anticipated events; and in order to accomplish this end he did not shrink from even the most atrocious crimes.³ How many children have been sacrificed to these astrological delusions!⁴

² Cf. Burckhardt, *ibid.*, pp. 10 f. and 209 ff.; more recently Professor R. Reitzenstein has indicated the significance of astrology in religious history, *Poimandres*, 1904, pp. 69 ff.

³ Cf. Eusebius, *Hist.*, VIII, 14, 5.

⁴ The children of Bethlehem are an example of such an offering to astrology to which the child Jesus himself almost fell a victim (Matt. 2: 7-16).

Eusebius⁵ claims that the emperor Maximian Daza did not move so much as a finger's breadth without the advice of omens and oracles, and the Megarian, Terpsion, in all seriousness understood the demon of Socrates as an ominous sneeze.⁶

How is it with the Christians? Are traces of such influence found here? Only negatively. The Christians proudly confess that they are free from this influence. Jesus' trust in God does not admit of fatalism, of belief in an unalterable destiny, and of submission to the power of the stars. Certainly the Christians were acquainted with all these ideas, for they had themselves been slaves of these powers; but all this lay behind them now for Christ had freed them from it. With what disdain Paul speaks of the beggarly elements of the world,⁷ and how joyfully he professes faith in the love of God, and in Jesus Christ, from whom no constellation of the stars can separate him.⁸ Ignatius exults in the thought that the new star, around which all the rest of the constellations, together with the sun and moon, danced in concert, brought confusion to all astrology and abolished all magic.⁹ Anxious attention to omens is so alien to the thought of Christians that they must even be exhorted not to forget in their plans that they are not indeed wholly masters of their own life, but that God is to be consulted regarding their affairs.¹⁰ The magical practices of heathendom are mentioned only as something lying outside of Christianity. In his letter to the Galatians, who are in ill repute in this respect, Paul uses *βασκαλῆν* figuratively, and enumerates *θαρμακεία* among the vices (the works of the flesh).¹¹ According to Acts 19:19 the preaching of Paul at Ephesus, in connection with a brilliantly successful act of exorcism, effected the conversion of many persons from belief in magic, and led to the destruction of many magical books. Through their faith the Christians knew themselves to be immune from all hurtful influences; they could take up serpents and drink poison without suffering harm.¹²

⁵ *Hist.*, VIII, 14, 8.

⁹ *ad Eph.* 19.

⁶ Plutarch, *De genio Socratis*, xi.

¹⁰ *Jas.* 4:13 ff.

⁷ *Gal.* 4:9; *Col.* 2:20.

¹¹ *Gal.* 3:1; 5:20.

⁸ *ἐψωμα* and *βάθος*, *Rom.* 8:39.

¹² With [Mark] 16:18 compare the illustrations in Acts 28:3 f., and in the legends about John in the apocryphal Acts and in Tertullian, *praesu. haer.* 36.

But do we not have here a kind of rival magic? Is not the use of Jesus' name in the stories of healings, as in Acts 2:6, 16, and especially in exorcism, quite on a level with the use of a magical formula?¹³ Is it to be understood otherwise when Paul places the name of Christ and the power of Christ side by side in condemning the offender in Corinth?¹⁴ Do not his views of baptism, and the Lord's Supper show a sacramental idea verging on the magical? One less cautious might say that they show magical traits.

In several recent publications this view has been strongly maintained,¹⁵ and it at first impresses one favorably. But when one reflects upon the general tenor of Paul's letters it becomes clear that, for Paul, at all events these were only detached notions which stood quite in the background, and which probably were only an unusual expression of a supreme religious experience of God's power.¹⁶ Perhaps it is otherwise with Luke, who, as a physician not indeed of the school of Hippocrates, yet in the spirit of hellenism, represents Christianity to his readers as the superior healing power, the higher magic.¹⁷ Yet at the same time he thinks of something quite different and incomparably higher, viz., the Savior of sinners and the certainty of divine grace. Similarly the Epistle to the Hebrews pictures Christianity as the fulfilment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, and nevertheless has in view the annulment of all sacrifice in the heavenly high-priesthood of the Son of God who mediates for his own people.

Thus the New Testament when carefully read corroborates the impression, derived from other sources, of the great influence of these astrological and magical arts upon the life of the times. But it shows this only as the background against which the life

¹³ Mark 9:38 ff.; Acts 19:13 ff.

¹⁴ I Cor. 5:4.

¹⁵ A. Eichhorn, *Das Abendmahl im Neuen Testament*, 1898; W. Heitmüller, *Taufe und Abendmahl bei Paulus*, 1902, and *Im Namen Jesu*, 1902; H. Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*, 1903; W. Bousset on I Cor., chaps. 10 and 11; A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, 1903; R. Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, 1910.

¹⁶ E. von Dobschütz, "Sakrament und Symbol," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1905, 1-40; and *Der gegenwärtige Stand der neutestamentlichen Exegese*, 1906.

¹⁷ Accordingly Simon Magus desires to purchase from the apostles the magical power of communicating the Holy Spirit; but how forcibly Peter rejects this idea (Acts 8:19 f.)!

of the Christian, itself determined by other motives, stood in contrast. It is not enough to say that this points merely to the close connection of primitive Christianity with Judaism. True, the New Testament in spite of its gentile interest belongs on the Jewish side; but the Judaism of this period was not identical with the religion of the prophets. On the contrary Jews were in ill repute as magicians and exorcists. Christianity stood in contrast both to Judaism and to heathenism as the religion of the new salvation, the true faith in God.

II

For Jews as for gentiles the world was filled with numerous good as well as evil spirits. Everywhere there lurked imps and demons to do men harm; and everywhere benevolent spirits stood ready to help provided men knew how to put them under obligation; hence the wealth of apotropaic magic with which Greeks as well as Romans surrounded life from the cradle to the grave to safeguard against the evil spirits; hence all sorts of gifts and pious practices to please and honor the good spirits.

The Jews classified these spirits as demons and angels. Against the former he arrayed his exorcism; the latter received a respect almost verging on worship and that too not solely among the Essenes. The Christians of the first century in every way share these notions. What a rôle exorcism played in Jesus' lifetime and later, is evident from the gospels and Acts.¹⁸ In I Cor. 8:7 we see that their former heathen attitude had been retained by many Christians. But at the same time we notice that for Christians themselves all has changed: victorious assurance has displaced anxious watching; in the name of Jesus even the demons are subject to them.¹⁹ Without the complex apparatus of Jewish exorcism²⁰ every Christian cast out the hostile demons, expelling them simply in the power of Jesus' name.²¹ And if this again looks like a higher form of magic, Rom. 8:28 shows a very different point of view. One can read through all the Pauline letters without being seriously concerned with this richly demoniacal world.

There is only one point where it stands out clearly, that is,

¹⁸ Cf. especially Acts 16:16 ff.

²⁰ Cf. Josephus, *Ant.*, VIII, ii, 5, 47.

¹⁹ Luke 10:17.

²¹ Mark 16:17.

in reference to participation in the heathen sacrificial cult. In I Cor. 8:7 we see how the gentile felt about this, and how in accordance with his previous gentile thought many a Christian continued to feel. Partaking of the sacrificial flesh brings one into immediate contact with the god to whom the offering belongs, that is, as the Christian now said, into contact with the demon again. Such contact is thought of as quite mechanical. The sacrificial flesh is infested by the demon, therefore the weaker Christians fear to partake of it even unawares. It is quite otherwise with Paul and with the majority of the Corinthian community. As the gods of the heathen are nothing, so the sacrificial flesh is nothing; it is ordinary flesh, and cannot harm a Christian if he partakes of it with thanksgiving to God. Only one thing does Paul emphasize, in contrast with the shallow intelligence and bold indifference of many Corinthians, viz., that in heathendom (not in individual idols) demoniacal powers are certainly active, and he who gives himself thoughtlessly to heathen society thereby steps within the circle of their influence. That is to say, it is the spirit of heathendom against which Paul warns his Corinthian converts; the danger is not in the flesh of the offered beast, but in fellowship with the adherents of heathendom.

It can be called enlightened Jewish judgment when Paul so disdainfully characterizes as dumb idols the heathen gods of which he, however, says remarkably little.²² But it is because of his Christian point of view that he, overlooking the whole world of demons, takes Satan himself as his enemy. In all the adversities he encounters, in the prevention of journeys, in sickness, in the appearance of false teachers, in the apostasy of some adherent he sees Satan's activity.²³ But even here victorious certainty predominates in early Christian thought. Satan can do no harm, he cannot stop God's work; he is conquered,²⁴ overthrown,²⁵ bound.²⁶ So Christians do not live in fear; and at the same time, through Christ, they are freed also from the fear of death.²⁷ Indeed, Satan must ultimately be of service for the work of salvation; the

²² I Cor. 12:2; I Thess. 1:9.

²³ I Thess. 2:18; II Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 12:7.

²⁴ Mark 3:27.

²⁵ Luke 10:18.

²⁶ Rev. 20:2.

²⁷ Heb. 2:15.

sinner is handed over to him for the destruction of the flesh in order that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.²⁸

The thought of good spirits has also undergone a change; for certainly Christians believe in benevolent beings, in angels. For every man and every child there was a guardian angel who stood in the presence of God,²⁹ and it was thought possible to see and hear a person's angel.³⁰ But even if some consideration is due to these angels,³¹ nothing depends on their favorable attitude; for they are simply ministering spirits who have to fulfil God's will for the sake of those who inherit salvation.³²

Christians feel themselves of equal rank with these spirit beings, yes, even superior to them.³³ Thus, the primitive Christians' belief in angels is not a determining motive of moral action; it only serves to bring to more vivid expression the Christian's absolute trust in God.

In the ascetic tendencies of the Phrygian Christians we recognize how easily the ancient belief in such mediating spirit beings gave rise to the thought that it was necessary to pay special honor to them by acts of self-denial. The ascetic practices which Paul styles self-chosen worship (*ἐθελοθρησκεία*) are clearly connected with the reverence for angels (*θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων*)³⁴ as is fully shown in the well-known gnostic systems, with their aeon-cult and their encratism. But here again, Paul points out in the Colossian letter how belief on Christ as the Son of God, who stands high above all these spirit-powers, the mediator of creation as well as of the work of salvation, so represses all these spirit-beings, that it almost

²⁸ I Cor. 5:5. Cf. my book, *Die urchristlichen Gemeinden*, pp. 269 ff. English translation by G. Bremner, *Christian Life in the Primitive Church*, pp. 387 f.

²⁹ Matt. 18:10.

³⁰ Acts 12:15.

³¹ I Cor. 11:10 is not yet satisfactorily explained. We do not know whether the angels here are thought of as guardians of order, as mediators of prayer, or more especially as beings morally undetermined, therefore incitable to sin, and carnally lustful.

³² Heb. 1:14.

³³ Rev. 22:9; I Cor. 6:3. If, indeed, rabbinical Midrash would solemnize the law by claiming the mediation of angels in the law's promulgation, in just this do the Christians find a proof of its inferiority: Gal. 3:19; Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:2.

³⁴ Col. 2:18, 23.

means their annihilation. Christ on the cross has triumphed over them—effective paradox of faith.

III

As in the popular conceptions of antiquity all events in nature and history were not viewed as happening in their rigid logical succession, but in isolation,³⁵ so also in human conduct every act appeared as something by itself, which, as was thought often to be the case, was called forth by some influence acting from without. Here we enter the rich territory of inspiration and of revelation. On Jewish soil instruction from angels corresponded to the oracle of heathendom, and here, as there, dreams played a rôle.

Primitive Christianity also is familiar with all this, and it exercises no slight influence in the determination of human life. The nativity narrative of Matthew's gospel shows us the influence of the dream combined with the appearance of an angel. Luke's narrative in Acts speaks repeatedly of visions (*ὄραμα*) which determine individual's actions, the best known being that of Paul at Troas, which induced him to pass over into Europe.³⁶ Commonly two visions occur correspondingly with reference to one another, thus attesting their divine objectivity. For example, those of Paul and Ananias,³⁷ or Peter and Cornelius.³⁸ Indeed, Luke pictures Paul's journeys through Asia Minor as though Paul had formed no definite plan of march, but had allowed himself to be directed now north, now west, solely by a constantly renewed instruction of the Spirit.³⁹ Visions strengthened him in Corinth.⁴⁰ He formed his decision for his last great journey *ἐν τῷ πνεύματι*,⁴¹ while foreboding of death and a direct prophetic announcement of his fate attended him.⁴² The letters of the apostle substantiate the view that revelations and visions played a great rôle in his life.⁴³ Upon an explicit revelation he decided to go up to Jerusalem to the so-

³⁵ It is hardly necessary to state expressly that the philosophical views of, e.g., the Stoic, stand in sharp contrast with this popular conception. The idea of logical connection appears in the New Testament, for example, in Jas. 1:14 ff.

³⁶ Acts 16:9.

³⁸ Acts 10:1 ff.

⁴⁰ Acts 18:9.

³⁷ Acts 9:10 ff.

³⁹ Acts 16:6 ff.

⁴¹ Acts 19:21.

⁴² Acts 20:25, 28; 21:11.

⁴³ Cf. especially II Cor. 12:1 ff.

called apostolic council;⁴⁴ yet we observe that he planned extensively,⁴⁵ that he chose his fields of activity according to clear principles, that these revelations are not something sudden and external, encroaching upon his activity, but they are answers to questions which he has laid before God in prayer.⁴⁶

Very often in the life of the community, and of the individuals when some special step had to be taken, such revelations, mostly in the form of prophetic utterances, determined the matter in question. Acts 13:1 f. mentions this in reference to the commissioning of the missionaries, and Acts 1:26 shows that even the lot was used as a means of ascertaining God's will; yet at the same time the narrative of Acts 6:1-6 concerning the appointment of the seven, through election by the congregation at the suggestion of the Twelve, may be borne in mind, and also Paul's purely natural manner of expression in I Cor. 16:15 f. Stephen and his companions set themselves to minister to the saints; Paul on his own initiative despatched Timothy;⁴⁷ he admonished the brethren to go before him;⁴⁸ Titus accepted this admonition willingly, indeed, going forth of his own accord, and in this act Paul saw evidence of a divine activity upon Titus' heart.⁴⁹ One sees here how easily the natural point of view passes over through religious conviction into the supernatural. It is the nature of Christian faith to recognize God's will in all events, as Luther set forth so clearly in his letter to the magistrate of Prague about the right method of choosing and consecrating a Protestant Bishop: when all human affairs in the election and consecration moved forward in an orderly manner one was to believe firmly that this was from God. There is here no distinction between the ancient and the modern view. It is the religious conviction in contrast with the irreligious.

IV

In contrast with the joyousness of the older Greek life, there had grown up in the hellenistic period a deep tendency toward a pessimistic view of life. Man was oppressed by a feeling of guilt, and

⁴⁴ Gal. 2:2.

⁴⁵ Rom. 15:19 ff.

⁴⁶ Cf. II Cor. 12:1 ff.; also I Thess. 4:15 ff., and my explanation in Meyer's *Kommentar*, 7. Aufl., 1909, pp. 193 f.

⁴⁷ Cf. I Thess. 3:2, 5; II Cor. 8:18, 22.

⁴⁸ II Cor. 9:5.

⁴⁹ II Cor. 8:16 f.

this guilt was due to nothing other than his material existence. The pure soul was contaminated through contact with the physical body ($\sigma\omega\mu\alpha = \sigma\eta\mu\alpha$ of the soul). Hence the necessity of expiation and self-denial. Accordingly asceticism was a widespread tendency, expressing itself especially in the form of vegetarianism and abstinence from wine. In favor of this, all sorts of reasons were found, rational and hygienic, as well as transcendental (through metempsychosis). But still the determining motive was that ascetic tendency which rested upon a dualistic world-view. This current was so strong in hellenism that even Judaism, whose monotheistic world-view was originally quite averse to such asceticism, had been drawn under its spell.

And now came primitive Christianity with its joyously confident life and its high moral earnestness. Jesus had stood in outspoken opposition to the ascetism of John the Baptist. But we are not surprised to find this feature in the primitive Christian mission receding before the insistent disposition toward asceticism. If holiness was actually one of the chief quests of Christianity, then the ancient man, heathen as well as Jew, could not understand it other than in the sense of abstinence from all material enjoyment. And he must have been confirmed in this by beholding the uncontrolled sensuality of heathendom, as well in the heathen cultus as in the theater and the public play. To be a Christian meant to live otherwise than the heathen, so the conclusion was that it meant the mortification of the flesh, the combating of sensual pleasure, the practice of asceticism.

We can see that in many, indeed in almost all, Pauline communities, this motive for the conduct of life was more or less strongly operative. Cautious individuals in Corinth would avoid marriage and renounce the eating of flesh (in which, however, their fear of contamination through contact with the idol sacrifices was determinative); in Rome there was among the Christians a circle of strict vegetarians about which we unfortunately know nothing definite, and in the Phrygian communities ascetic practices appear in connection with speculation about aeons, and angel worship, as we have already seen.

This is, however, only one phase of the matter. Other circles in

the same communities made the catch word of Christian freedom a cloak for an unbridled life. They formed for themselves a theory of moral *adiaphora* which allowed widest latitude for the indulgence of all sensuous desires. Directly in opposition to them, others were confirmed in their ascetic inclinations. Here they saw the principle of holiness which seemed to them the more important menaced by the principle of freedom.

It is certainly remarkable that Paul, the great teacher of his communities, knew how to find the right way in this conflict of principles. For he was a man combining the ancient world-view with strong ethical inclinations, a man, therefore, whose natural bias was in the direction of asceticism. He was unmarried, and would that all others were the same.⁵⁰ He clearly had the greatest sympathy for those vegetarians in Rome even though he designated them as "the weak in the faith."⁵¹ But he most decidedly deprecates making a law for Christianity out of such asceticism.⁵² The positive right of marriage is fixed for him on the basis of a word of the Lord about its indissoluble character,⁵³ as is also the right to eat all foods with thanksgiving to God the creator; in consequence of Jesus' words all is pure, nothing is of itself unclean.⁵⁴ The only decisive thing for Paul is one's own conscience and consideration for the conscience of the brother, that is, love.

To this decision, given by Paul not without self-conquest, we owe it that the basal thought of the moral life in Christianity was not submerged in the stream of such ascetic tendencies as we have mentioned. How great the danger was is shown in Revelation 14:4 where only virgins are expressly recognized as perfect Christians, and in the gnostic schools established upon ascetic regulations of the Christian life. On the other hand, it is greatly to the credit of the great church community that it so steadfastly refrained from making a law out of asceticism, although it appeared to be an ideal embodying so much higher a type of Christianity. The theory of a double moral standard,⁵⁵ though we look upon it from the Protestant standpoint as something so inferior, eventually saved the fundamental thought of the gospel for modern times.

⁵⁰ I Cor. 7:7.

⁵¹ Rom. 14:1 f.

⁵² Col. 20:2 f.

⁵³ I Cor. 7:10.

⁵⁴ Mark 7:15 ff.; 14:14, 20.

⁵⁵ Cf. especially Did. 6:1.

V

If national custom was a power in heathendom, for the strict Jew it was life, and Jewish custom was something quite distinctive. We know from the Roman satirists what an impression it made upon the different strata of heathen society. Despite all hostility against the Jews, despite all abhorrence of, and contempt for them, their tenacious adherence to their ancestral customs made an impression. Many a thing seemed interesting and important, and was often copied, just because it was really groundless, or because its meaning was difficult to comprehend. Although hellenistic Judaism took such pains to adapt its legalistic teaching, as the true practical philosophy, to the tastes of the heathen, in actual life the community in the Diaspora was kept together through strict exclusiveness in external relations, and through faithful adherence to the ancestral customs within the community.

Christianity had soon overleaped the national barriers, and created communities in which Jews and gentiles were found together. A *superstitio nova*, as its enemies called it, it had no customs of its own to offer, nor could it according to its spirit sanction offhand the customs of gentiles and of Jews. The enthusiastic sway of the spirit could at first deceive Christians as to the deficiency showing itself here. Paul could expect of the Spirit that it would shape the life of the community from within, without the aid of external regulation. But he himself often had eventually to intervene to establish order, and he did it both consciously and unconsciously under the influence of Jewish custom.

We see in Peter's case how hard it was for a Jew to free himself from the customs of his people. Although Peter through association with Jesus, who was perfectly free inwardly because bound only to God, had attained to a certain conception of freedom, yet it cost him a great effort to draw the practical consequences of his conviction. This is shown by the state of affairs in Antioch where he, under the first impression of the flourishing community life here among Jews and gentiles, did not hold himself aloof from its fellowship, but later timidly drew back at the remonstrance of zealous Jewish Christians.⁵⁶ The Book of Acts sets forth this

⁵⁶ Gal. 2:11 ff.

problem still more clearly in the story of Cornelius. There is need of an impressive heavenly command to divert Peter's thoughts from his exclamation of alarm: "No, Lord, I have never eaten anything common and unclean."⁵⁷

Recent research, with its keener eye for the illogical and the psychologically genuine, has observed that even Paul, in spite of all his clarity on questions of principle as to the limits of Judaism, as to the worthlessness of the law, and the impossibility of erecting Jewish customs in the gentile community, is definitely entangled in Jewish prejudices and in participation in Jewish rites which goes even farther than mere accommodation. Such items as the circumcision of Timothy, the vow in Cenchreae, the Nazirite vow in Jerusalem, all of which the Tübingen criticism easily rejected as harmonistic distortions of the genuine Pauline portrait, are today generally considered authentic.⁵⁸

Thus we can see that even Paul as an organizer of the community acted both consciously and unconsciously under the influence of Jewish customs. The most important point is that he, following the impulse toward self-preservation which is found in the synagogue of the Diaspora, strongly recommended to his communities exclusiveness toward those without and close union within. Regard for the impression made upon outsiders also plays a rôle in determining the behavior of Christians. They avoid offending either Jews or gentiles, or the community of God.⁵⁹ But far more important is their self-differentiation from those who are without—they have no fellowship with those who serve idols.⁶⁰ This stands out especially clearly in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, among whom certainly a strong inclination seems to have existed to continue their former life, including intercourse with former friends. On the contrary we see in I Pet. 4:4 that the sharp distinction is already clearly drawn, and the gentiles on their part take offense at the fact that the Christians are so exclusive and consider themselves better than the heathen.

⁵⁷ Acts 10:14 ff.

⁵⁸ Harnack, *Beiträge zur Einleitung ins N.T.*, IV, 1911.

⁵⁹ I Cor. 10:32; cf. I Thess. 4:12.

⁶⁰ II Cor. 6:14 ff.

While with Paul a liberal attitude always dominates, in the Johannine writings we meet the principle of being otherwise than the world and of shutting one's self out from all gentile affairs. This principle is expressed with an energy which is only explicable as coming from Judaism and from Jewish Christianity.⁶¹ At the same time a tendency to inner unity is evident in the exclusive emphasis on the "Love one another" and the "brotherly love"; while with Paul Christian *caritas* extends beyond the narrow confines of the community.⁶² And while in Paul's writings the fundamental principle of order is balanced by the principle which never disregards freedom, his later period shows a distinct tendency to make the former exclusively valuable, and this, too, in a sense which often already recalls hierarchic rulership. Subordination to the leaders of the community is the highest Christian duty.

VI

Up to this point we have been concerned with those views which early Christianity shared in common with its age. But in addition to these we find, as specifically its own, the eschatological note, that is, the belief that with the parousia of the Lord, the final judgment of human destinies, the transformation of all outer relationships, and the time of salvation are immediately at hand. We are not concerned here with the ideas about this future, nor with the significance of eschatology for questions of belief,⁶³ but only with its effect upon life.

It is evident that such a belief can exert the strongest influence upon the actions of those who share it. But the motive can make itself felt in very different directions; it can stimulate moral energy, or it can paralyze it. We observe the latter in Thessalonica, where a too strenuous expectation of the end put many Christians into a

⁶¹ Cf. III John, chap. 7; I John 3:13; 5:21; John 17:14, etc.

⁶² I Thess. 4:9; Gal. 6:10.

⁶³ I may here refer to my Oxford lectures, *The Eschatology of the Gospels*, 1910, London: Hodder & Stoughton, in which I believe I have shown that eschatology, certainly for Jesus and his apostles, in addition to its ethical significance as a stimulus, had served the dogmatic interest of setting Jesus' person and work in the right light. The saving significance of Jesus' death cannot be understood without the background of eschatology, either according to Rom. 3:21 ff. or according to Heb. 9:23 ff.

state of excitement, while they simply neglected their immediate moral obligations. As up till now the pressure of the social situation had necessitated the exertion of all their powers, so at the moment when the prospect of freedom from this pressure showed itself their energy accordingly relaxed. They no longer worked but went about idly, although their excessive spiritual activity prevented them from realizing this defect. Hence their financial affairs became disarranged, they became a burden to the community, and they discredited Christianity in the eyes of the gentiles.⁶⁴ Paul, who in his first letter had very definitely exhorted them to watchfulness and sobriety,⁶⁵ found himself compelled in his second letter to speak very forcibly against these disorderly brethren.

But this is really only an anomalous effect, observed in this place only. For the most part this expectation of the imminent end acted as a strong moral stimulus. From it Paul himself derived his incentive for carrying the gospel with all possible haste throughout the whole world.⁶⁶ Moreover, he freely set before his communities the nearness of the Lord's parousia as a valid parenetic motive. Here ancient Jewish ideas of the imminent judgment day are mingled with the Christian expectation of the dawning time of salvation. Here are motives of fear⁶⁷ and fervent longing, and exhortations to sanctification⁶⁸ and to the realization of genuine Christian character.⁶⁹ In Heb. 10:25 the expectation of the end strengthens the demand for close inner union and mutual exhortation, while in I John 2:18 it intensifies the warning against false teachers.

Thus eschatology as a powerful motive for moral strenuousness, for watchfulness, and for preparedness,⁷⁰ certainly plays an important part in the discipline of primitive Christianity. Nevertheless this expectation of the *parousia* exercised scarcely any material influence over the content of Christian behavior. True, in I Cor. 7:29 ff. Paul adduces the brevity of the present world-order among the motives which dissuade the Christian from entering matrimony, but it is only a fortifying motive. From eschatology alone he would

⁶⁴ I Thess. 4:10.

⁶⁶ Cf. Mark 13:10.

⁶⁸ Rom. 13:11 ff.

⁶⁵ I Thess. 5:6 ff.

⁶⁷ Phil. 2:12.

⁶⁹ Phil. 4:5.

⁷⁰ Cf. Luke 12:25; 21:34; I Pet. 1:13.

not have arrived at his negative attitude toward marriage, had not the basal ascetic tendency of the time suggested it. Even the idea that in existing conditions, as Christianity found them, nothing was to be changed,⁷¹ is only in the smallest part determined by the thought that this is but a short transition period. Weightier is the genuine gospel thought that everyone is to walk as the Lord has apportioned to each, as God has called him. In contrast with Judaism, which would fain tear its proselytes from their relationships, the Christian regarded the natural relationships of life as God-given.

VII

If, now, all these motives, foreign to us but familiar to the ancients and to primitive Christianity, were not the decisive ones for them, whence may we look in primitive Christianity for the source of so distinctive a type of behavior that it seems in many respects foreign to us? Whence may we discover the moral power which regards the most exacting demands as eagerly to be obeyed? We see clearly that it is not because of asceticism imposing self-tormenting and severe renunciations, nor is it due to Jewish rabbinical striving after righteousness, seeking to win the highest possible reward through the performance of the greatest possible works. The fundamental temper of Christianity is otherwise. It is one of gladness, joyfulness, spontaneity. This is attested by such acts as the joyous surrender of all possessions by Joseph called Barnabas,⁷² by free-will ministrations for the community, such as the journey of Stephanas⁷³ and of many other brethren, by the bountiful contributions of the gentile Christians for their brethren in Jerusalem,⁷⁴ and by the contributions of the Philippians for the apostle.⁷⁵ Many more evidences might be cited. This note may also be traced throughout the exhortations of the apostle Paul: "As you already do, so may you abound more and more."⁷⁶ Paul does not think of lightening the burden of such sayings of the Lord as those about loving one's enemies, refraining from asserting

⁷¹ I Cor. 7:17 ff.

⁷² Acts 4:36 ff.

⁷³ I Cor. 16:15.

⁷⁴ II Cor. 8:1 ff.; Rom. 15:26 ff.

⁷⁵ Phil. 1:5; 4:15.

⁷⁶ I Thess. 4:1.

one's rights, and suffering unjustly in order to make them more acceptable to the communities as many a preacher does. He sets these things before them with all harshness as unquestioned activities of the Christian disposition, and he counts on their fulfilment precisely in the power of that joyousness which is ready for any sacrifice.

Whence comes this disposition? It is what we call the enthusiasm of primitive Christianity, the inspiration which of itself lifted men out of and above themselves. But what is the source of this inspiration? We say too little when we call it the activity of the spirit of God upon these men. That it certainly was, and not as some call it, a psychopathic phenomenon, a contagion similar to that in the days of the flagellants of the Middle Ages. But spiritual activity, where it is genuine, is always bound up with existing presuppositions. What were these presuppositions? These first Christians had experienced something which had completely transformed them. Salvation had come into the world with Jesus, and the gospel of Jesus had freed them from all the restrictions which formerly rested upon them; the guilt of sin was removed from them, and the power of the demons, of the stars, and of magic, was broken. They felt themselves free and exalted. These poor artisans and slaves saw themselves called to participate in the kingdom of glory. Indeed Paul taught them that to be in God's kingdom meant not only being a citizen and a subject, but being a joint ruler.⁷⁷ Accordingly all earthly values were displaced. What was earthly life, what were earthly goods, what was honor and fame among men when contrasted with this salvation which they possessed and which could be called eternal life, a pure possession, and a divine glory! They had become transformed. When Paul called Christians a new creature, it is not theory but personal experience which he is ever reiterating.⁷⁸ And the things around them had also been changed.

⁷⁷ I Cor. 4:8.

⁷⁸ Philo says of the Jewish proselytes *γίνονται γὰρ εὐθὺς οἱ ἐπηλύται σώφρονες, ἐγκρατεῖς, αἰδήμονες, ἡμεροί, χρηστοί, φιλόανθρωποι, σεμνοί, δίκαιοι, μεγαλόφρονες, ἀληθείας ἐρασταί, κρείττους χρημάτων καὶ ἡδονῆς*.—*de virt.* 182 (Cohn-Wendland, V, 323). This moral change Paul has observed in more than one member of his community.

And all these things had happened to them purely through divine grace without effort on their part. This called forth a feeling of gratitude which showed itself as one of their strongest impulses. It is already so represented by Jesus in the parable of the two debtors and it was expressed in the tears of the sinful woman⁷⁹ as in the anointing at Bethany.⁸⁰ To this was traced the courage of Joseph of Arimathea when he ventured to ask Pilate to release the body of the crucified one,⁸¹ and this was the motive for all the heroic deeds of primitive Christianity. Paul expresses it powerfully in his own way when he designates the one who was made free by Christ as servant of Jesus Christ, as bound to Jesus Christ. It is thankfulness which binds him to serve the one to whom he is indebted for his new existence. John means this when he says we love him because he first loved us.⁸²

VIII

But the strength of an impulse is not the only criterion of its worth. It is just when enthusiasm is at its highest pitch that it can most easily go astray, as the history of ecstasy sufficiently demonstrates. The feeling of freedom, misconstrued in an intellectual direction, can certainly lead to serious moral error, as we observe in the free thinking at Corinth. The feeling of unreserved surrender to a seer, to a prophet, or to a savior, can degenerate into fanaticism—one thinks of Islam. It is the character of the guiding personality that ultimately stands out as precisely the factor determining the direction which all outgoing impulses receive. Now, Jesus' character is holy love⁸³ and from this the chief motive in early Christianity is fixed as holy love—not *eros* in the sense of the Greeks—even of the best such as Plato—but *caritas*,⁸⁴ that is, the love which seeks nothing for itself, and does not even act in order to satisfy its desire to love, but thinks only in the highest sense of the well-being of others; not a love which gives alms, but one which serves. Where this principle of ministering love, which

⁷⁹ Luke 7:41 f. ⁸⁰ Mark 14:3 ff. ⁸¹ Mark 15:43. ⁸² I John 4:9 f., 19.

⁸³ Besides Professor Peabody's writings, reference may here be made to J. Ninck, *Jesus als Charakter*, 1906.

⁸⁴ Cf. Harnack's brilliant exposition of I Cor., chap. 13, in the *Sitzungsberichte der Berliner Akademie* (1911), VII.

does not even stop short of death for the good of others, is moved into the center of all thinking, there must the entire life become changed; there no one calls his goods his own, but all things are had in common;⁸⁵ there each one gladly places himself at the service of, and makes personal sacrifices for, the common cause; there each one serves the other and seeks to bear the other's burdens;⁸⁶ there no one thinks to avenge an injury done him, but seeks to requite evil with good.⁸⁷

I would not be misunderstood. I do not say that Jesus brought a new moral teaching based upon the principle of love for mankind in general, or even for enemies, but that Christ, in bringing a new religion, established a new relation between God and men, which is of a spiritually moral sort through and through, and so brought a new morality. As fellowship with God is represented in Jesus, and through him is re-established among men, it had to be converted into a new moral conduct. That the moral powers of primitive Christianity were so strenuous is not to be wondered at. On the contrary, the wonder is that this tension was so quickly relaxed, and that with the second generation after Jesus' death it could happen that Christian preachers must say to their congregations: according to the example of Christ we ought to live for the brethren—where abides love, if one never once helps the needy brother out of his distress.⁸⁸ This only shows that very soon in Christendom that experience of salvation, upon which all this moral energy rested, was no longer realized so powerfully as to overcome the opposition of moral indolence and laxity. Beside the church of Smyrna with its self-denying ability and its patience in suffering,⁸⁹ and that of Philadelphia with its missionary zeal and its faithful confession,⁹⁰ stands the church of Ephesus which has forsaken its first love,⁹¹ the church of Sardis which is alive only in name,⁹² and the church of Laodicea with its lukewarmness.⁹³

The retreat of eschatology, the disillusionment brought about through the delay of the longed-for parousia, certainly contributed something to this result. Afflictions increased in number, yet the

⁸⁵ Acts 4:32.

⁸⁶ Gal. 6:2.

⁸⁷ Rom. 12:17, 21.

⁸⁸ I John 3:16 f.

⁸⁹ Rev. 2:8 f.

⁹⁰ Rev. 3:7 ff.

⁹¹ Rev. 2:4.

⁹² Rev. 3:1.

⁹³ Rev. 3:16.

promised salvation failed to appear. That is the situation of the Christians to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews is directed. But this disillusionment would have been easily overcome if the experience of salvation in its original power had been newly awakened. Instead of this, the author of Hebrews shows that even with the leading men of the time, notwithstanding their insight into the unique grandeur of the salvation offered in Christ, the understanding was perverted. They lived more in hope than in faith; their faith is only trustful hope, and therefore no longer has transforming power.

With this transformation of Christianity from a religion of experienced salvation into such a religion of hoped-for salvation, is connected in this later period also the greater prominence of sacramental ideas, since belief in a future salvation needs stronger and more obvious guarantees. Religion of the spirit and of truth is thus drawn into the *τελεταί* of hellenism, which is saturated with oriental influences. Therewith the door is opened widely to all the *superstitio* of antiquity, and it streams into Christianity with alarming speed and strength,⁹⁴ bringing with it on the one hand belief in demons, and devil play, and, on the other, worship of angels in connection with the cult of saints.

And since it is no longer God and his salvation which are kept exclusively in view, but man and his accomplishments, asceticism, in the sense of meritorious action to help win salvation, very soon comes into Christianity. The note of joy and pleasure is past; there is trembling and fear as formerly before Jesus came.

So we see that all the motives of antiquity which in primitive Christianity exerted scarcely any perceptible influence upon the first Christians, asserted themselves with increasing power from the second century on, as was the case also outside the Christian church in the religious development of heathendom, in Neoplatonism. Against this background is seen the significance of the fact that early Christianity was so free from these motives. The New Testament belongs in antiquity, in the first century, yet it nevertheless transcends its age and belongs to all the centuries.

⁹⁴ See my article, "Charms," in Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.